THE LONE WOLF

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

SYNOPSIS.

—2—

At Troyon's, a Paris inn, the youth Marcel Troyon, afterwards to be known as Michael Lanyard, is caught stealing by Burke, an expert thief, who takes the boy with him to America and makes of him a finished cracksman. After stealing the Omber jewels and the Huysman war plans in London Lanyard returns to Troyon's for the first time in many years because he thinks Roddy, a Scotland Yard man, is on his trail. On arrival he finds Roddy already installed as a guest.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

However impulsively, he hadn't sought Troyon's without definite intent, to wit, to gain some clue, however slender, to the mystery of that wretched child, Marcel. But now it appeared he had procrastinated fatally—time and change had left little other than the shell of the Troyon's he remembered. Papa Troyon was gone; madame no longer occupied the desk of the caisse; inquiries, so discreetly worded as to be uncompromising, elicited from the maitre d'hotel the information that the house had been under new management these eighteen months; the old proprietor was dead, and his widow had sold out lock, stock and barrel, and retired to the country, it was not known exactly where. And with the new administration had come fresh decorations and furnishings and a complete change of personnel—not even one of the old waiters remained.

"'All are gone, the old, familiar faces,'" Lanyard quoted in vindictive melancholy—"damn 'em!"

Happily it was demonstrated that the cuisine was being maintained on its erstwhile plane of excellence—one still had that comfort!

Other impressions, less intimate, proved puzzling, disconcerting and paradoxically reassuring.

Lanyard commanded a fair view of Roddy across the waist of the room. The detective had ordered a meal that matched his aspect well, both of true British simplicity. He was a square-set man with a square jaw, cold blue eyes, a fat nose, a thin-lipped trap of a mouth, a face as red as rare beefsteak.

His dinner comprised a cut from the joint, boiled potatoes, brussels sprouts, a bit of cheese, a bottle of Bass. He ate slowly, chewing with the doggedness of a strong character hampered by a weak digestion, and all the while kept his eyes fixed to an issue of the Paris edition of the London Daily Mail with an effect of concentration quite too convincing.

Now one doesn't read the Paris edition of the London Daily Mail with intense excitement. Humanly speaking, it can't be done.

Where, then, was the object of this so sedulously dissembled interest?

Lanyard wasn't slow to solve this riddle to his satisfaction—in so far, that is, as it was satisfactory to feel yet more certain that Roddy's quarry was another than himself.

Despite the lateness of the hour, which had by now turned ten o'clock, the restaurant had still a dozen tables or so in the service of guests pleasantly engaged in lengthening out an agreeable evening with dessert, coffee, liqueurs and cigarettes. The majority of these were in couples, but at a table one removed from Roddy's sat a party of three; and Lanyard noticed, or fancied, that the man from Scotland Yard turned his newspaper only during lulls in the conversation in this quarter.

Of the three, one would pass for an American of position and wealth—a man of something more than sixty years, with an execrable accent, a racking cough, and a thin, patrician cast of countenance clouded darkly by the expression of a soul in torment, furrowed, seamed, twisted—a mask of mortal anguish. And once, when he looked up and casually encountered Lanyard's gaze, the adventurer was shocked to find himself staring into eyes that were as the eyes of a dead man—eyes of a gray so light that at a little distance the color of the iris blended indistinguishably with their whites, leaving visible only the round, black points of pupils abnormally distended and staring, blank, fixed, passionless, beneath lashless lids.

For the instant they seemed to explore Lanyard's very soul with a look of remote and impersonal curiosity; then they fell away, and when next the adventurer looked the man had turned to attend to some observation of one of his companions with a smile that fairly transfigured his face, the smile of a charming child.

On his right sat a girl who might be his daughter, for not only was she, too, obviously American, but she was far too young to be the other's wife. A demure, old-fashioned type, well poised but unassuming, fetchingly gowned, and with sufficient individuality of taste, but not conspicuously; a girl with soft, brown hair and soft, brown eyes; pretty, not extravagantly so when her face was in repose, but with a slow smile that made her scarcely less than beautiful—in all, Lanyard thought, the kind of woman who is predestined to comfort mankind, whose strongest instinct is the maternal.

She took little part in the conversation, seldom interrupted what was practically a duologue between her putative father and the third member of the little party.

This last was one whom Lanyard was sure he knew, though he could see no more than the back of M. le Comte Remy de Morbihan.

And he wondered with a thrill of amusement if it were possible that Roddy was on the trail of that tremendous buck. If so, it would be a chase worth following—a diversion rendered the more exquisite to Lanyard by the spice of novelty, since for once he would figure as a dispassionate bystander.

The name of Comte Remy de Morbihan, although unrecorded in the Almanach de Gotha, was one to conjure with in the Paris of his day and generation. He claimed the distinction of being at once the ugliest, one of the wealthiest and the most-liked man in France.

As to his looks, good or bad, they were said to prove infallibly fatal with women, while not a few men, perhaps for that reason, did their possessor the honor to imitate them. The revues burlesqued him; Sem caricatured him; Forain counterfeited him extensively in that inimitable series of Monday morning cartoons for Le Figaro—one said "De Morbihan" instinctively at sight of that stocky figure, short and broad, topped by a chubby, moon-like mask with waxed mustache, womanish eyes, and never-failing grin.

A creature of proverbial good nature and exhaustless vitality, his extraordinary popularity was due to the equally extraordinary extravagance with which he supported that latest Gallic fad, "le sport." The Parisian Rugby team was his pampered protege; he was an active member of the tennis club, maintained not only a flock of automobiles but a famous racing stable, rode to hounds, was a good field gun, patronized aviation and motor-boat racing, risked as many maximums during the Monte Carlo season as the Grand Duke Michael himself, and was always ready to whet rapiers or burn a little harmless powder of an early morning in the Parc aux Princes.

But there were some ugly whispers in circulation about the sources of his fabulous wealth. Lanyard, for one, wouldn't have thought him the properest company or the best Parisian cicerone for an ailing American gentleman blessed with independent means and an attractive daughter.

Paris, on the other hand—Paris who forgives everything to him who contributes to her amusement—adored Comte Remy de Morbihan.

But perhaps Lanyard was prejudiced by his partiality for Americans, a sentiment the outgrowth of those several years he had spent with Bourke in New York. He even fancied that between his spirit and theirs existed some subtle bond of sympathy. For all he knew, he might himself be American.

CHAPTER III.

A Point of Interrogation.

For some time Lanyard strained to catch something of the conversation that seemed to prove so interesting to Roddy, but without success, thanks to the hum of voices that filled the room. In time, however, the gathering began to thin out, until at length there remained only this party of three. Lanyard enjoying a most delectable salad and Roddy puffing a cigar (with such evidence of enjoyment that Lanyard suspected him of the sin of smuggling) and slowly emptying another bottle of Bass.

Under these conditions the talk between De Morbihan and the Americans became public property.

The first remark overheard by Lanyard came from the elderly American, following a pause and a consultation of his watch.

"Quarter to eleven," he announced.

"Plenty of time," said De Morbihan cheerfully. "That is," he amended, "if mademoiselle isn't bored."

The girl's reply, something which was accompanied by a pretty inclination of her head toward the Frenchman, was lost in the other's accents. He had a strong and sonorous voice, in strange contrast with his ravaged appearance and distressing cough.

"Don't let that hurry you," he advised cheerfully. "Lucia's accustomed to keeping late hours with me; and whoever heard of a young and pretty woman being bored on the third day of her first visit to Paris?"

He pronounced the name with the soft "c" of the Italian tongue, as though it were spelled "Luchia."

"To be sure," laughed the Frenchman; "one suspects it will be long before mademoiselle loses interest in the Rue de la Paix."

"You may well, when such beautiful things come from it," said the girl. "See what we found there today."

She slipped a ring from her hand and passed it to De Morbihan.

There followed silence for an instant, then an exclamation from the Frenchman:

"But it is superb! Accept, mademoiselle, my compliments. It is worthy even of you."

She flushed prettily as she nodded smiling acknowledgment.

"Ah, you Americans!" De Morbihan sighed. "You fill us with envy—you have the souls of poets and the wealth of princes!"

"But we must come to Paris to find beautiful things for our womenfolk!"

"Take care, though, lest you go too far, M. Bannon."

"How so—too far?"

"You might attract the attention of the Lone Wolf. They say he's on the prowl once more."

The American laughed a trace contemptuously. Lanyard's fingers tightened on his knife and fork; otherwise he made no sign. A sidelong glance into a mirror at his elbow showed Roddy still absorbed in the Daily Mail.

The girl bent forward with a look of eager interest.

"The Lone Wolf? Who is that?"

"You don't know him in America, mademoiselle?"

"No-o."

"The Lone Wolf, my dear Lucia," the valetudinarian explained in dry and humorous accents, "is the sobriquet fastened by some imaginative French reporter upon a celebrated criminal who seems to have made himself something of a pest over here these last few years. Nobody knows anything definite about him, apparently, but he operates in a most individual way and keeps the police busy trying to guess where he'll strike next."

The girl breathed an incredulous exclamation.

"But I assure you!" De Morbihan protested. "The rogue has had a wonderfully successful career, thanks to his dispensing with confederates and confining his depredations to jewels and similar valuables—portable and easy to convert into cash. Yet," he added, nodding sagely, "one is not afraid to predict that his race is almost run."

"You don't tell me!" the older man exclaimed. "Have they picked up the scent—at last?"

"The man is known," De Morbihan affirmed.

By now the conversation had caught the interest of several loitering waiters, who were listening open-mouthed; and even Roddy seemed a bit startled, and for once forgot to make business with his newspaper, but his wondering stare was exclusively for De Morbihan.

Lanyard put down knife and fork, swallowed a final mouthful of Haut Brion, and lighted a cigarette with the hand of a man who knew not the meaning of nerves.

"Garcon!" he called quietly, and ordered coffee and cigars, with a liqueur to follow.

"Known!" the American exclaimed. "They've caught him, eh?"

"I didn't say that," De Morbihan laughed; "but the mystery is no more—in certain quarters."

"Who is he, then?"

"That—monsieur will pardon me—I'm not yet free to state. Indeed, I may be indiscreet in saying as much as I do. Yet, among friends—"

His shrug suggested that, as far as he was concerned, waiters were not human and the other guests of the establishment non-existent.

"But," the American protested, "perhaps you can tell us how they got on his track?"

"It was not difficult," said De Morbihan; "indeed, quite simple. This

"The Lone Wolf? Who Is That?"

tone of depreciation is becoming, for it was my part to suggest the solution to my friend, the chief of the surete. He had been annoyed and distressed, and was even talking of resigning because of his inability to cope with this gentleman, the Lone Wolf. And since he is my friend, I, too, was distressed on his behalf, and badgered my poor wits until they chanced upon the idea which led us to the light."

"You won't tell us?" the girl protested, with a little moue of disappointment as the Frenchman paused provokingly.

"Perhaps I should not. And yet—why not? As I say, it was elementary reasoning—a mere matter of logical deduction and elimination. Once made up one's mind the Lone Wolf must be a certain type of man; the rest was simply sifting France for the man to fit the theory and then watching him until he gave himself away."

"You're not going to stop there?" the American demanded in an aggrieved tone.

"No? I must continue? Very well; I confess to some little pride. It was a feat. He is cunning, that one!"

De Morbihan paused and shifted sidewise in his chair, grinning like a mischievous child.

By this maneuver, thanks to the arrangement of mirrors lining the walls, he commanded an indirect view of Lanyard, a fact of which the latter was not unaware, though his expression remained unchanged as he sat—with a corner of his eye reserved for Roddy—speculating whether De Morbihan were telling the truth or only boasting for his own glorification.

"Do go on—please!" the girl begged prettily.

"I can deny you nothing, mademoiselle. Well, then! From what little was known of this mysterious creature, one readily inferred he must be a bachelor, with no close friends. That is clear, I trust?"

"Too deep for me, my friend," the elderly man confessed.

"Impenetrable reticence," the count expounded—and enjoying himself hugely—"isn't possible in the human relations. Sooner or later one is doomed to share one's secrets, however reluctantly, even unconsciously, with a wife, a mistress, a child, or with some trusted friend. And a secret between two is—a prolific breeder of platitudes! Granted this line of reasoning, the Lone Wolf is of necessity not only unmarried, but practically friendless. Other attributes of his will obviously comprise youth, courage, imagination, a rather high order of intelligence, and a social position—let us say, rather, an ostensible business—enabling him to travel at will hither and yon without exciting comment. So far, good!

"My friend, the chief of the surete, forthwith commissioned his agents to seek such a one, and by this means several fine fish were enmeshed in the net of suspicion, carefully scrutinized, and one by one let go—all except one, the veritable man. Him they sedulously watched, shadowing him across Europe and back again. He was in Berlin at the time of the famous Rheinhart robbery, though he compassed that coup without detection; he was in Vienna when the British embassy there was looted, but escaped by a clever ruse and managed to dispose of his plunder before the agents of the surete could lay hands on him; recently he has been in London, and there he made love to and ran away with the diamonds of a certain lady of some eminence. You have heard of Mme. Omber, eh?"

Now by Roddy's expression it was plain that, if Mme. Omber's name wasn't strange in his hearing, at least he found this news about her most surprising. He was staring openly, with a slackened jaw and stupefaction in his blank, blue eyes.

Lanyard gently pinched the small end of a cigar, dipped it into his demi tasse, and lighted it with not so much as a suspicion of tremor. His brain, however, was working rapidly in the effort to determine whether De Morbihan meant this for a warning or was simply narrating an amusing yarn founded on advance information and amplified by an ingenious imagination. For by now the news of the Omber affair must have thrilled many a continental telegraph wire.

"Mme. Omber—of course!" the American agreed thoughtfully. "Everyone has heard of her wonderful diamonds. The real marvel is that the Lone Wolf neglected so shining a mark as long as he did."

"But truly so, monsieur!"

"And they caught him at it, eh?"

"Not precisely; but he left a clue—and London as well—with such haste as would seem to indicate he knew his cunning hand had for once slipped."

"Then they'll nab him soon?"

"Ah, monsieur, one must say no more!" De Morbihan protested. "Rest assured that the chief of the surete has laid his plans—his web is spun, and so artfully that I think our unsociable outlaw will soon be making friends in the prison of the Sante. But now we must adjourn. One is sorry. It has been so very pleasant."

A waiter conjured the bill from some recess of his waistcoat and served it on a clean plate to the American. Another ran bawling for the cloakroom attendant. Roddy glued his gaze afresh to the Daily Mail. The party rose.

Lanyard noticed that the American signed the bill instead of settling it with cash, indicating that he resided at Troyon's as well as dined there. And the adventurer found time to remark that it was odd for such a one to seek that particular establishment in preference to the palatial modern hostelries of the Rive Droite—before De Morbihan, ostensibly for the first time espying Lanyard, plunged across the room with both hands outstretched and a cry of joyous surprise not really justified by their rather slight acquaintanceship.

"Ah! Ah!" he clamored vivaciously. "It is M. Lanyard, who knows all about paintings! But this is delightful—a grand pleasure! You must know my friends. But come!"

And seizing Lanyard's hands, when that one somewhat reluctantly rose in response to this surprisingly overexuberant greeting, he dragged him willy-nilly from behind his table.

"And you are American, too. Certainly you must know one another. Mlle. Bannon—with your permission—my friend, M. Lanyard. And M. Bannon—an old, dear friend, with whom you will share a passion for the beauties of art."

The hand of the American, when Lanyard clasped it, was cold, as cold as ice; and as their eyes met that abominable cough laid hold of the man, as it were by the nape of his neck, and shook him viciously. Before it had finished with him his sensitively colored face was purple and he was gasping, breathless—and infuriated.

"M. Bannon," De Morbihan explained disconnectedly—"It is most

Rose in Response to This Greeting.

distressing—I tell him he should not stop in Paris at this season."

"It is nothing!" the American interposed brusquely between paroxysms.

"But our winter climate, monsieur—it is not fit for those in the prime of health—"

"It is I who am unfit!" Bannon snapped, pressing a handkerchief to his lips—"unfit to live!" he amended venomously.

Lanyard murmured a conventional expression of sympathy. Through it all he was conscious of the regard of the girl. Her soft, brown eyes met his candidly, with a look cool in its composure, straightforward in its inquiry, neither bold nor mock-demure. And if they were the first to fall, it was with an effect of curiosity sated, without trace of discomfiture. And somehow the adventurer felt himself measured, classified, filed away.

Between amusement and pique he continued to stare, while the elderly American recovered his breath and De Morbihan jabbered on with unfailing vivacity; and he thought that this closer scrutiny discovered in her face contours suggesting maturity of thought beyond her apparent years—which were somewhat less than the sum of his own—and with this the suggestion of an elusive, provoking quality of wistful languor, a hint of patient melancholy.

"We are off for a glimpse of Montmartre," De Morbihan was explaining—"M. Bannon and I. He has not seen Paris in twenty years, he tells me. Well, it will be amusing to show him what changes have taken place in all that time. One regrets mademoiselle is too fatigued to accompany us. But you, my friend—now if you would consent to make our third, it would be most amiable of you."

"I'm sorry," Lanyard excused himself; "but, as you see, I am only just in from the railroad, a long and tiresome journey. You are very good, but I—"

"Good?" De Morbihan exclaimed with violence. "I? On the contrary, I am a very selfish man; I seek but to afford myself the pleasure of your company. You lead such a busy life, my friend, romping about Europe, here one day, God knows where the next, that one must make one's best of your spare moments. You will join us, surely?"

"Really I cannot tonight. Another time, perhaps, if you will excuse me."

"But it is always the way!" De Morbihan explained to his friends with a vast show of mock indignation. "'Another time, perhaps'—his invariable response! I tell you, not two men in all Paris have any real acquaintance with this gentleman whom all Paris knows! His reserve is proverbial—'as distant as Lanyard,' we say on the boulevards!"

And turning again to the adventurer, meeting his cold stare with the De Morbihan grin of quenchless effrontery:

"As you will, my friend!" he granted. "But should you change your mind—well, you'll have no trouble finding us. Ask any place along the conventional route. We see far too little of each other, monsieur—and I am most anxious to have a little chat with you."

"It will be an honor," Lanyard returned formally.

In his heart he was pondering several most excruciating methods of murdering the man. What did he mean? How much did he know? If he knew anything, he must mean ill, for assuredly he could not be ignorant of Roddy's business or that every other word he uttered was riveting suspicion of identity with the Lone Wolf or that Roddy was listening with all his ears and staring into the bargain!

Decidedly something must be done to silence this animal, De Morbihan, should it turn out he really did know something!

It was only after profound reflection over his liqueur—while Roddy devoured his Daily Mail and washed it down with a third bottle of Bass—that Lanyard summoned the maitre d'hotel and asked for a room.

It would never do to fix the doubts of the detective by going elsewhere that night. But, fortunately, Lanyard knew that warren which was Troyon's as no one else knew it; Roddy would find it hard to detain him should events seem to advise an early departure.

CHAPTER IV.

A Stratagem.

When the maitre d'hotel had shown him all over the establishment—innocently enough, en route, furnishing him with a complete list of his other guests and their rooms, memoranda readily registered by a retentive memory—Lanyard chose the bedchamber next that occupied by Roddy, in the second story.

The consideration influencing this selection was, of course, that so situated he would be in a position not only to keep an eye on the man from Scotland Yard, but also to determine whether or not Roddy were disposed to keep an eye on him.

In those days Lanyard's faith in himself was a beautiful thing. He could not have enjoyed the immunity ascribed to the Lone Wolf so long as he had without gaining a power of sturdy self-confidence in addition to a certain degree of temperate contempt for the spies of the law and all their ways.

Reviewing the scene in the restaurant, Lanyard felt measurably warranted in assuming not only that Roddy was interested in De Morbihan, but that the Frenchman was well aware of that interest. And he resented sincerely his inability to feel as confident that the count, with his gossip about the Lone Wolf, had been merely seeking to divert Roddy's interest to putatively larger game. It was just possible that De Morbihan's identification of Lanyard with that mysterious personage, at least by innuendo, had been unintentional. But somehow Lanyard didn't believe it had.

However, one would surely learn something illuminating before very long. The business of a sleuth is to sleuth, and sooner or later Roddy must surely make some move to indicate the quarter wherein his real interest lay.

Just at present, reasoning from noises audible through the bolted door that communicated with the adjoining bedchamber, the business of a sleuth seemed to comprise going to bed.

Lanyard, shaving and dressing, could distinctly hear a tuneless voice contentedly humming "Sally in Our Alley," a rendition punctuated by one heavy thump, and then another, and then by a heartfelt sigh of relief—as Roddy kicked off his boots—and followed by the tapping of a pipe against grate-bars, the complaint of a window being lowered for ventilation, the click of an electric-light switch, and the creaking of bed springs.

Finally, and before Lanyard had finished dressing, the man from Scotland Yard began placidly to snore.

Of course, he might well be bluffing, for Lanyard had taken pains to let Roddy know that they were room neighbors by announcing his selection in loud tones close to the communicating door.

But this was a question which the adventurer meant to have answered before he went out.

It was hard upon twelve o'clock when the mirror on the dressing table assured him that he was at length in the habit and apparel of a gentleman of elegant nocturnal leisure. But if he approved the figure he cut, it was mainly because clothes interested him and he reckoned his own impeccable. Of their tenant he was feeling just then a bit less sure than he had half an hour since; his regard was lowering and mistrustful.

He was, in short, suffering reaction from the high spirits engendered by his cross-channel exploits, his successful getaway, and the unusual circumstances attendant upon his return to this memory-haunted mausoleum of an unhappy childhood. He even shivered a trifle, as if under premonition of misfortune.

With one last look round to make certain there was nothing in his room's calculated disorder to incriminate him were it to be searched in his absence, Lanyard enveloped himself in a long, full-skirted coat, clapped on an opera hat, and went out, noisily locking the door. He might as well have left it wide; but it would do no harm to pretend he didn't know the bedchamber keys at Troyon's were interchangeable—identically the same keys, in fact, that had been in service in the time of Marcel the wretched.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Figures Quickly Gathered.

In the last census the enumeration of the population in cities and towns lasted 15 days. In the rural districts the population and agricultural enumerations combined were completed in about thirty days.

Wherein the Difficulty.

"Yes, sir, one hour's uninterrupted reading each evening would make you—" "Uninterrupted? Where do you think my wife spends her evenings?"—New York Times.

Simplified.

"I'm trying to figure out a way to enlarge the lobby of my theater," said the manager. "It's entirely too small."

"Why not cut out the box office?" suggested one of his patrons. "I haven't been able to buy a ticket there in three years. The speculators have them all."

For Future Reference.

Miss Ribbons (the typist)—What are you marking that baseball schedule with a blue pencil for, Adalbert?

Adalbert (the office boy)—Oh! I'm jes' fixin' de dates when me granmudder's an' grandfadders funerals is goin' ter take place.

Up-to-Date.

"How is Doctor Wombat as a physician?"

"Best ever. When you get exhausted over bridge he prescribes dancing as a rest cure."

A girl may not care to be everything to an eligible young man; she's usually satisfied to become his better half.

JOURNALISTS OF THE BIBLE

Savior Master of Art of Publicity, Is the Assertion Made by Dean of University.

Christ was a master of the art of advertising, John proved himself a great editor and there is no better reporter than Luke, according to Walter Williams, dean of the school of journalism of the University of Missouri, who addressed a Sunday school convention in St. Louis, says a St. Louis (Mo.) dispatch to the New York Herald.

"Even Christ's last words were not for silence, but for Christian publicity," said Mr. Williams. "Whenever a church has kept the good news of the gospel to itself it has died. When it has given this news out it has conquered.

"When Kitchener wanted 1,000,000 men he advertised in the newspapers. When the church wants 1,000,000 strong men to aid its cause it rings a bell for five minutes on Sunday.

"Luke, with his vivid phrases, wrote the greatest report in the world—the story of Christ," said Mr. Williams. "John proved himself the best editor, for he freely used the blue pencil, stating, 'If I wished, I could fill many volumes.'

"Even the devil advertises," said Mr. Williams, "his specialty being white lights."

GET BEST MILK IN WINTER

Recent Investigations Serve to Show That Former Popular Impressions Have Been Wrong.

It has always been believed that milk, butter and other dairy products are at their best in the spring and summer, when the cows have the best pastures. But recent investigations conducted by the Massachusetts state board of health fail to bear out this widespread popular belief. They indicate, on the contrary, that under current conditions the milk obtained in summer is, if anything, somewhat inferior in quality to that obtained in the winter when the cows are shut up in stables.

At a temperature of 50 degrees the bacteria in milk will increase in fifty hours from three to thirty times the initial number, while at 70 degrees they will multiply 40,000 times. This is why milk should be kept cold.

Milk will not sour for several days if packed in ice.